

Questions Remain as Secret Service Response to Congressional Gannon Inquiry Comes Back Incomplete

Reps. Slaughter & Conyers Press for Complete Answers to Lingering Questions

Washington, DC - Yesterday, Representative Louise Slaughter, Ranking Member of the Rules Committee and Representative John Conyers, Jr., Ranking Member of the House Judiciary Committee, received a letter from the Secret Service in response to their February 10, 2005, questions about how a conservative activist operating under the assumed name "Jeff Gannon" was cleared for entrance to the White House.

While the Secret Service confirmed that "Jeff Gannon" received his clearance under his real name, James Guckert, it did not answer many of the other questions posed to it by the Representatives, such as:

- Who or what office is responsible for ultimately granting access to the White House given the applicant passes his background check, including who or what office asked the Secret Service to complete a background check on Mr. Guckert specifically?
- Whether a single clearance lasts indefinitely or whether the applicant must reapply for each day pass?
- How many times and on what days Mr. Guckert was cleared, and who requested that clearance?

Mr. Conyers said, "I thank the Secret Service for its partial response, but I am disappointed that it dodged the heart of the issue: who at the White House paved the way for Mr. Guckert to have repeated and staged access to the President."

Ms. Slaughter said, "While I appreciate the Secret Service's response to some of our questions, the bigger picture remains. The relationship between this Administration and Jeff Gannon was anything but typical and the American people deserve the full, unvarnished truth." Slaughter added, "Who at the White House was responsible for submitting Mr. Guckert's name for clearance? How often was he cleared? On what days did he receive a day pass?. We deserve answers to these important questions."

These unanswered questions were subsequently submitted by Reps. Slaughter and Conyers as a Freedom of Information Act request on February 15, 2005. Under law, Department of Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff has until March 16 to respond.

The text of the Secret Service's letter follows:

March 7, 2005

The Honorable John Conyers, Jr.

U.S. House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515-6216

The Honorable Louise Slaughter

U.S. House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515-3228

Dear Mr. Conyers and Ms. Slaughter:

Your letter of February 10, 2005, to Director Basham inquiring about procedures used to clear individuals seeking to participate in White House briefings was forwarded to my office for reply. As the Secret Service is responsible solely for the security of the White House complex, I will focus my reply on those issues you raised that pertain to security measures implemented by this agency.

Please be advised that our Office of Protective Operations has looked into this matter and has determined that there was no deviation from Secret Service standards and procedures as your letter suggests. Mr. Guckert provided the Secret Service with his legal name, rather than his "pen name," and was assessed using the same criteria applied to all individuals seeking access to White House briefings.

In determining who is afforded access, federal regulations provide that the Secret Service "will be guided solely by the principle of whether the applicant presents a potential source of physical danger to the President and/or the family of the President so serious as to justify his or her exclusion from White House press privileges." 31 C.F.R. 409.1 (2005). Secret

Service screening procedures at the White House are tailored to meet this requirement.

Finally, we would note that members of the press who are afforded access to the White House may utilize professional names that differ from their legal names. The Secret Service, however, requires that legal names be provided to enable the screening processes to work effectively.

I hope that this information addresses your concerns.

Sincerely,

Conrad A. Everett

Deputy Assistant Director